

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3822

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0123

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID SWEL PINS ET

SUBJECT: FOOD AND RELIEF SITUATION IN ERITREA

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REF: 75 ASMARA 1005 (DTG 171330Z DEC 75)

1. IN EFFORT TO MAINTAIN PERSPECTIVE ON IMPLICATIONS OF
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RECURRENT REPORTED FOOD SHORTAGES IN ERITREA, IN GENERAL,

AND ASMARA, IN PARTICULAR, CONGEN HAS REVIEWED FOOD AND RELIEF SITUATION WITH MENGISTU AYALEW (PROTECT COMPLETELY), DIRECTOR ASMARA BRANCH, AGRICULTURAL MARKETING CORP. (FORMERLY ETHIOPIAN GRAIN CORP.) AND TERRY KIRCH, PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF CRS. GENERAL IMPRESSION IS THAT RELIEF ACTIVITIES ARE PROCEEDING ON VERY LIMITED SCALE, WITH PROGRAM EXPANSION DEPENDENT PRIMARILY ON EPMG DECISIONS TO EASE RESTRICTIONS. FOOD SITUATION IN URBAN AREAS REMAINS SUDRECT TO SPORADIC SHORTAGES, BUT SERIOUS EPMG ATTENTION APPARENTLY BEING FOCUSED ON PROBLEM. IN RURAL AREAS, SHIFT TO SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE AND NEAR RECORD RAINFALL APPEARS TO HAVE PRODUCED ADEQUATE SUPPLIES FOR EXURBAN POPULATION.

2. ONLY ACTIVE RELIEF PROGRAM IN ERITREA AT PRESENT IS CRS PRE-SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM WHICH HAS PROVIDED MONTHLY

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RATIONS TO 31,800 REGISTERED CHILDREN THROUGH NINE DISTRIBUTION CENTERS IN ASMARA. CURRENTLY THEY ARE FURNISHING UNICEF CSM (CONTRIBUTED BY USG), BUT HOPE TO RECEIVE THEIR OWN STOCK OF FOOD BY END OF MARCH. THEY HAVE INQUIRED FROM EPMG AS TO POSSIBILITY OF EXPANDING PROGRAM TO KEREN WHERE THEY ESTIMATE 20,000 CHILDREN COULD BENEF Y, BUT EPMG HAS NOT BEEN RESPONSIVE TO SUCH PROBES. THEY WILL SOON OPEN SEVERAL CENTERS IN MASSAWA WHERE CRS ESTIMATES THERE ARE 7-8,000 NEEDY RECIPIENTS. RELIEF AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION (RRC), WHICH CONTINUES TO HOLD 3,000 MT OF SURGHUM IN STORAGE AND REPORTEDLY JUST RECEIVED AN ADDITIONAL 4,000 MT OF WFP WHEAT, HAS NOT UNDERTAKEN ANY RELIEF OPERATIONS SINCE JUNE, 1975, THEIR INACTION BEING ASCRIBED TO TIMIDNESS AND INEFFECTUALITY OF LOCAL RRC DIRECTOR, COL. TESSEMA. EVEN VERY MINIMAL PROGRAM OF RELIGIOUS RELIEF SERVICE, RESUMED BRIEFLY IN DECEMBER, HAS BEEN SUSPENDED IN LOCAL POLITICAL SQUABBLE OVER WHO DECIDES WHO SHOULD RECEIVE FOOD.

3. MENGISTU, WHOSE ORGANIZATION IS EPMG CORPORATION UNDER MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, WHICH IMPORTS GRAIN

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INFO ERITREA FOR COMMERCIAL SALE, REPORTS THAT MANY FOOD SHORTAGES ARE RESULT OF EPMG AUTHORITIES DECISION TO WITHHOLD AVAILABLE GRAINS FROM COMMERCIAL MARKET. EXAMPLE OF ADMINISTRATIVELY CREATED SHORTAGE, FOR SEVERAL WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY NO WHEAT BREAD AVAILABLE IN ASMARA.

ALTHOUGH WHEAT BREAD IS NOT A MAJOR ITEM IN ERITREAN DIET, AS LOCAL MILLING CAPACITY IS ONLY 30 MT/DAY THERE IS ALMOST O YEAR'S SUPPLY OF WHEAT FOR BREAD CURRENTLY IN ASMARA. MENGISTU WAS AT LOSS TO EXPLAIN WHY EPMG AUTHORITIES HAVE SUSPENDED DISTRIBUTION OF THIS WHEAT. HE FURTHER SAID THAT CURRENT GRAIN STOCKS IN ASMARA ARE AS FOLLOWS: 3700 MT OF "EUROPEAN" WHEAT; 8,000 MT OF CANADIAN AND LOCAL WHEAT; AND 500 MT OF TEFF. HE ALSO CONFIRMED CONGEN ANALYSIS THAT RURAL AREAS HAVE ADEQUATE SUPPLIES OF BASIC FOOD AS RESULT SHIFT TO SUBSISTENCE CROPS AND NEAR RECORD RAINFALL, COMBINED WITH INSURGENT PROHIBITION ON MOVEMENT OF FOOD FROM COUNTRY INFO CITIES.

4. PERHAPS MOST SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION REVEALED BY THIS SURVEY OF FOOD SITUATION IS THAT MENGISTU PREPARED AND

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SUBMITTED TO ERITREAN REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION DETAILED ESTIMATE OF GRAIN REQUIREMENTS FOR URBAN AREAS OF ERITREA. MENGISTU WAS UNWILLING TO DISCLOSE DETAILS OF HIS REPORT, BUT HE DID ADMIT THA HIS ESTIMATE OF GRAIN WHICH WILL HAVE TO BE IMPORTED INTO ERITREA DURING COMING YEAR WOULD EXCEED 200,000 MT, WHICH IS MORE THAN DOUBLE GENERALLY ACCEPTED FIGURE OF 100,000 MT ANNUAL GRAIN SHORTFALL FOR ERITREA. IN ORDER TO IMPORT THIS QUANTITY OF GRAIN, EPMG WOULD HAVE TO ASSIGN ESCORT FORCES FOR 600 30 MT TRUCKS AND TRAILERS IN TWO CONVOYS PER MONTH (CURRENT OBJEVTIVE OF ROAD TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION), WHICH WOULD POSE SUBSTANTIAL BURDEN FOR BOTH EPMG MILITARY AND FOR COMMERCIAL TRANSPORTATION. THIS REPORT, ALTHOUGH IT UNDOUBTEDLY STIRRED CONTROVERSY AT EVERY LEVEL OF EPMG ADMINISTRATION, DID RECEIVE ENDORSEMENT
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OF BG GETACHEW, MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR, AND WAS DULY SUBMITTED TO ADDIS. MENGISTU SAID THAT HIS REPORT, COMPLETED IN JANUARY, DID NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ANY POSSIBLE RELIEF SUPPLIES BEING DISTRIBUTED IN ERITREA. LIKEWISE, IT DID NOT ESTIMATE ANY REDUCTION IN LEVEL OF CONSUMPTION (400 GRAMS OF GRAIN PER PERSON PER DAY). ASIDE FROM HIS

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OBVIOUS PRIDE OF AUTHORSHIP, MENGISTU IS AWARE THAT REPORT WILL CAUSE RIPPLES THROUGHOUT EPMG BY SIZEABLE JUMP IN ERITREAN GRAIN REQUIREMENTS. HE IS REALISTIC ENOUGH TO ACCEPT THAT CHANCE OF RECEIVING GRAIN IN QUANTITIES REQUESTED IS VERY REMOTE.

5. ON MAGNITUDE OF NEED FOR RELIEF SUPPLIES, MENGISTU
WOULD NOT HAZARD GUESS. HE DID CONCUR THAT NUMBER OF
POTENTIAL RELIEF RECIPIENTS IS INCREASING BECAUSE OF HIGH
UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLUX OF REFUGEES DISPLACED BY HOSTILITIES.

6. FOR ADDIS: BEYOND ESTIMATES CITED PARA 2 BY CRS, CONGEN
CANNOT ASSESS RELIEF REQUIREMENTS AND WOULD APPRECIATE
ANY ESTIMATES FOR ERITREA PUT FORWARD EITHER VOLAGS OR
EPMG AUTHORITIES.
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